

TEDDY ASHTON'S LANCASHIRE SCRAPBOOK

A selection from the writings
of Allen Clarke

Edited and introduced by Paul Salveson

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PREFACE

Most of Allen Clarke's work has long been out of print and almost forgotten. Yet in his day, Allen Clarke (or "Teddy Ashton") was one of Lancashire's most widely read writers. Grim-faced mule spinners would earnestly paste his "sketches" into scrapbooks and young kids would read – and write to – the *Children's Corner* in *Teddy Ashton's Northern Weekly*. It can honestly be said that few working class writers succeeded so well in appealing to what was an overwhelmingly working class readership. Clarke never pandered to some lowest common denominator or insulted people's intelligence. He just wrote simply, about things which working people cared about – love, family life, the countryside, the struggle for a better life. There are still some people around who remember him with deep affection, even those who never met him! For Clarke was a very public man in some ways, and frequently shared his sorrows and his joys with his readers. We hope that in this selection of Allen Clarke's work the reader will get some feeling of the sort of person he was – though like us all, he was a complex animal. Revolutionary? Mystic? Back-to-the-land crank? Down to earth Lancashire lad? He was all of these and none of them, and these writings should serve as a warning against trying to pigeon-hole him.

Some of these writings have already been given public readings at our Bolton People's History talks, at the Socialist Club on Wood Street. Now, through the generosity of Bolton Council, they are once again available to a wider audience. Hopefully, a revived interest in his writings will lead to more of his work being republished in the future.



A Moorland Well (Belmont Moors—Teddy Ashton on left)

Photo. by R. Penket

See page 49 A Winter Ride.

AN ELECTION ADDRESS TO TH' RACHDA FOLK.

Dear Fellow sufferers I' this vale o' tears, an' factories an' steam trams, yo're goin' to be allowed to have a bit o' recreation in th' shape o' a General Election; an' we hope it'll give yo' noather th' yead-warch or ballywarch; though yo'll have to listen to a sort o' speeches fro' them gents what caws thei'sels candidates, kindly leavin' it to their opponents to caw 'em other things.

Wi' two o' th' chaps that's puttin' up we'n nowt to do, an' we hope yo'll be nowt to do wi' 'em noather. Bankers is aw very well in their way, we daresay, but they have a deal o' brass in their coffers that owt by rest to be in workin' class pockets. But yo' can depend upon it that bankers an' railway directors ull never do owt for yo' except pay yo' a bit o' th' interest they mak thei'sels, an' keep railway fares up, not because they want to charge yo' dear for ridin' but because they know that walkin' is healthy an' good for yo'. Factory-maisters is aw very weel, too, but yo' never see 'em sendin' their own childer haue-time, nor rannin' after yo' to double yo're wages.

Th' third chap that's puttin' up is *Teddy Ashton*, his gradely name bein' Allen Clarke. Neaw, we know this mon, an' we know he's one o' ourseels, that is to say a workin' chap. We know he's tow'd yo' some rare buzzes abaut us what's gettin' this address up, an' made yo' lowf some oft at our marlocks, but as he's only done it for fun, we'n nowt to say again it. We say that yo' can safely trust *Teddy Ashton* to Parliament. Th' chap that likes to see folk merry, that does his best to make 'em lowf, that makes tens o' theausands o' folks lowf every week corn't be other than a good sort. Just as he's made yo' lowf on th' reet side o' yore face, he'll make them as doesn't do fair to yo' lowf on th' other side o' their face if yo'll only give him th' chance. He's jannock, is *Teddy*. He doesn't like to see anybody miserable or poor, he wants to see everybody happy; an' his object is to get everybody wages enoof to lowf heartily on. Yo' corn't lowf heartily on an empty pocket, con yo' *Teddy Ashton* likes them lines o' *Trafford Clegg*—one o' yore own clever writers what wrote some bonny tales:

"It's what aw ne'er could understand,
That folks wi' heauses, brass or lond,
Con sit wi' lifted e'en an' hond
On t' top o' t' wo',
Forgettin' there's a common bond
That binds us o'."

We know that if *Teddy Ashton* had his road he'd give yo' aw five peand a week an' a month's holiday

every fortnet; an' he'd pay yo' for holidays at o'er-time rates. He con hardly do that at present, though, because th' lords, an' dooks, an' aristocracks, an' bankers, an' factory maisters weren't let him. These folks tells yo' at election times heaw they love yo' an' what they'll do for yo' if yo'll only let 'em, but as soon as they get into Parliament their promises fizzes away like th' wynd eaut o' a punctured bike or t' flour eaut o' *Bet Spriggs*' bag—it had a hole in it, anone day when hoo went to th' Co-op. for a dozen o' flour it leaked aw th' road whum, an' hoo landed at th' Fowt wi' an empty flour bag. But *Bet* said hoo didn't care for losin' th' flour; hoo'd geet her cheque on it, an' th' divi. would be aw reet, so's heaw.

Mooast Liberal an' Tory candidates is like *Tum o' Tracle Fowt* an' his cooartin' o' *Sally Pickin'pag*. He tow'd her that if hoo'd wed him hoo should live like a lady, never goo to t' factory no moor, have two new dresses every summer an' spend aw th' Wakes at Blackpool. *Sally*, bein' young an' ignorant i' matterimony, believed him; an' they geet wed. But t' very fust mornin' after they were wed *Sally* were roused up by *Tum* shakin' her. "It's five o'clock," he said, "theau'd better be getting up an' off to thy looms." *Sally* stared. "Tha said tha'd keep me aw hum like a lady," hoo said. "Theau were a foo if tha believed me," said *Tum*; I'm eaut o' wark mysel, an' I'm not goin' to do noan so long as I've wed a four-loom weiver what con keep me. Get up this minute afore I punos thee eaut o' bed."

An' that's what the capitalists do—they trick yo' wi' nice tales, and then punos yo' eaut o' bed to keep 'em.

If yo' like it, yo're welcome to it. It's a free country, an' any mon's free to be a mug if he wants.

But if yo' object to being mugged, if yo' like good trade an' fair wages, three square meals a day an' a gradely supper, an' brass enough for a nice holiday neaw an' then, then row' up in yore theausands an' vote for *TEDDY ASHTON*, that's *ALLEN CLARKE*.

Yores summat like,

BILL SPRIGGS.

GEORGIE GREENSAUCE.

BILLY BOBBIN.

Tum Fowt, Sept. 30.

I endorse the above. Put *Teddy Ashton* in, an' ye'll never be put out. From the bottom o' my heart I ask yo' to put *Teddy Ashton* at the top o' the poll.—*PATSY FILLIGAN.*

Bill Spriggs as a "Bobby."

[Reprinted, by request, from *Teddy Ashton's Journal*, February, 1897.]

"WHY doesn't ta have a dust at bobbyin', *Bill*?" axed *Joe Lung* when t' Kock-Krow Menociation met t' other Wednesday neet, "for bobbyin' is a nice healthy job."
"I think I will," said *Bill*, "for I'm geettin' teight o' doin' nowt. I want a bit of exercise. I think I'll goo an' see if I can get on."

So th' next day *Bill* went deawn to t' Police Office an' axed if there were any bobbies wanted. They gan him a papper for t' get filled up abaut his character, age, an' other things; an' *Ben Roke* an' t' Curate took this in hond an' geet it filled up satisfactory. Then *Bill* went deawn to t' Police Office again, an' they took him in a ream to measure his size an' height. There were a soart of instrument again t' wa' for doin' this; a kind o' pow (pole) that were marked off in feet an' inches, wi' a wood as slid up an' deawn an' fitted o'er t' skull o' t' chap bein' measured.

Bill went an' fixed hissel' on t' machine.

"Ah," observed th' inspector, "you're only five feet seven. That's hardly tall enough."

"Well," said *Bill*, "if yo'll reckon them other two feet o' mine I'll be seven foot seven, sharn't I? An' I durn't see what inches has geet for t' do wi' it, or feet oather. I'll bet I can lock a mon up better nor thee, for I'd put my feet abaut him if he wouldn't come, I would that an' aw. I may not be as big as thee, but I'll bet I can do moovar, so's heaw it be—oather at feightin' or keepin' quiet. Besides, if thy forefaythers had been put on by wark same as mine, I'll bet as theau wouldn't ha been above t' size o' six-pennoth o' copper."

"That'll do, that'll do," cried th' inspector. "It's all right. You've got a good chest, and will make a tolerable officer."

"I'll st noan ha' t' stuff my chest wi' th' bed-tick, same as a lot o' bobbies does," said *Bill*, "for I—"

"All right, all right; that'll do. Come to-morrow morning at nine o'clock, and then you'll see whether you're accepted or not."

"Aw reet," said *Bill*, an' took his hook.

Th' next mornin' he went deawn to th' Police Office again, an' were tow'd he had to go before th' Watch Committee.

"Is that t' committee as t' bobbies gies aw t' watches to what they tak' off drunken chaps?" axed *Bill*.

Th' inspector lowfed, an' said, "Get along with you. They're waiting—turn in the first room on your right."

So Bill went an' walked in.

"Is this th' Clock Committee?" he inquired o' five or six men what were sit at a table.

"Yes," said one, "it's the Watch Committee, if that's what you want. What's your name?"

"Bill Spriggs."

"Oh—the celebrated Bill Spriggs, eh?"

"Ay, but I corn't help it."

"And you want to be of service to the community?"

"Neow, I want t' serve in t' police force."

"That's what I mean. You wish to serve the public?"

"I've done no wark for mony a year, so I think I con. What wi' t' practice I've had at doin' nowt, I'm just abeaut ready for bobbyin' neaw."

"All right, that'll do, thank you. We'll let you know in a day or two whether you're taken on or not."

So Bill left t' Watch Committee, an', strange to say, he geet word in a couple of days that he were engaged as a policeman, an' could come deawn an' get his uniform. Whether t' Watch Committee took Bill on for a lark or not nobody knows; but there's plenty folk what's o' that opinion.

Bill went deawn to t' Police Parade Reaum th' followin' mornin', an' th' inspector chucked a lot o' clooas at him, an' towed him to pick caut what would fit him. Aw t' clooas were a heck of a lump too big, an' Bill didnt' like takkin' any of 'em, but he had for t' do t' best as he could, so he geet some treausers an' a cooat, an' a helmet, an' went whum, where he put 'em on, an' their Bet lowfed till t' tears run deawn her face at t' comical seet he cut. Bill didn't like this, an' said, "What are ta lowfin' at, dost reckon?"

"Thee," said Bet. "I never seed such a seet in aw my born days!" an' off hoo went again, chinkin' till hoo were black in t' face.

Bill scowled. "Theau murn't lowf at me," he said. "Bobbies isn't for t' be lowfed at. They mun be trated wi' respect—or at least common four penny."

"Neaw theau's hit it," lowfed Bet; "that's aw what mooast bobbies lives for—for t' creep reaund to t' back doors o' t' pubs an' get a glass or two on t' sly. A bobby would sooner be trated wi' a glass o' common fourpenny any day than a whole barrel o' respect."

"Well," said Bill. "I'm not to be lowfed at, anyheaw."

But Bet lowfed and lowfed.

"Why, thy cooat's a mile too big," hoo said, "an' thy treasurs legs would do wi' tucks on, an' thy helmet slips o'er thy yead like a tay-cosy o'er a taypot—an', by gum, theau *does* look a taypot, too, an' no mistake!"

"Howd on!" cried Bill, gettin' mad, "durn't be makin' me into crockery, or I'll breik summat. Theau's cawd me a mug mony a time, an' neaw theau caws me a taypot—theau'll be cawin' me a cup an' saucer next. Let me tell thee it's noan seemly, an' if t' Clock Committee yers as theau's been lowfin' at one o' their bobbies theau'll get locked up, an' fined seven days an' costs, so theau'd better give o'er lowfin' at once."

But Bet wouldn't, or couldn't; so Bill went i' t' back kitchen, put t' lookin' glass on t' floor again t' squeezers, an' tried for t' look at hissel' by instalments.

"I durn't see as there's so much for t' lowf at," he said, "an' I'm sure I st look as weel as any o' t' other bobbies when I turn caut in t' mornin'. If I durn't I'll eit my trunchcon raw, that I will."

An' wi' that he went upstairs an' pood his uniform off.

Th' next mornin' Bill put his bobby's clooas on, an' sit deawn havin' his breakfast. Th' childer crept deawnstairs, an' looked at him i' wonder.

"Why, my feyther's geet bobby's clooas on," said one o' t' lads.

"Ger away, that's noan my feyther," said another.

"Yah, it is; look at his whiskers," said t' fust, "an' theer's that scrat on his nose wheer my mother scrawped her fingers t' other neet when he turned up his nose at cowed broth for his supper. It's my feyther, sure enoof."

One o' Bill's wenches thowt hoo'd settle t' question, so hoo went up to him an' said, "Aren't yo' my feyther?"

"I rayther think I am," said Bill.

Just then Bet coom deawnstairs, an' when hoo seed Bill havin' two eggs for breakfast, hoo said, "Heaw dar' to be so extravagant! Two new-laid eggs at once! An' me corn't get a solitary one when I'm feelin' as wake as a kittlin' for want o' nourishment. It's monstrous."

Bill ducked his yead as if he were beaund t' creep under t' table; an' seein' this act aw th' childer cried caut, "Ay, it's eaur feyther, sure enoof."

"I intended havin' them two eggs for mysel'; I put 'em away special," said Bet. "An' neaw theau's t'an 'em."

"Well," said Bill, "neaw as I'm bein' a bobby I st ha' for t' keep my strength up. Heaw con I walk abeaut an' lock men up if I've nowt for t' keep my muscles in order?"

"Theau'll ha' t' find thy own eggs then," said Bet. "Theau mun get on neet duty wheer there's a two-three hencotes. For theau'll get no mooar eggs here this next twelvemonths unless theau finds 'em or lays 'em thyself."

"I'll be gooin'," said Bill. "It's time I were off."

He put on his cooat, an' helmet, an' straightened hissel' up. His treausers were abeaut six inches too lung, so he doubled t' bottom o' t' legs up.

"A bonny seet theau looks," said Bet. "I durn't know who put thee up to this job, but whoever it were; were only after a lowf I think. Anybody can make a mug on thee."

"I know that," said Bill. "I fun that eaut soon after I geet wed."

"Noan o' thy slack," said Bet. "Lord knows what theau'd ha' been if I hadn't ta'n pity on thee."

"My helmet's a bit too big," said Bill; an' he went into th' back kitchen, where he geet a prato and put it inside th' helmet to fill it up.

"It fits better neaw," said Bill, "though it's rayther wobbly."

Bill seet off. As soon as he geet off t' doorstep he cocked up his yead, tried for t' look as lawf as he could, an' strutted deawn t' fowt wi' a stiff swagger. His childer stood at t' door watchin' him, an' preaudly tellin' t' neighbour childer that their fayther were a bobby neaw; while t' women o' t' fowt coom to their doors an' smiled in aw directions.

"Laws!" said one; "theer's Bill Spriggs i' bobby's clooas. Look at his breeches! They want a tuck on 'em."

"His coot's rayther slack across t' back," said another. "There's reaum in it for t' grow."

"Oh, that'll run up when it rains," said another.

"If it only runs up as fast as Bill will run when there's a row on," said another, "it'll be too little afore to-neet."

"Let t' poor mon a-be!" said another. "He's wed, so he's takkin' to bobbyin' for a peaceful life."

An' t' women kept up their skittin' remarks till Bill were eaut o' seet.

Bill went deawn into t' teawn, causin' a good bit o' comic talk on t' road, an' reached t' Teawn Ha' in hauce-an-heaur.

"Good mornin'," he said to one o' t' sergeants, "what have I for t' do?"

"Get on your beat, and do your duty," said the sergeant.

"Which is my beat, an' what's my duty?" axed Bill.

"Well, the Chief says you're to have a promiscuous beat for a start—that is, you walk about anywhere you like. As for your duty—you must stop anybody you see doin' anythin' wrong; and above all, don't let people stand an' make obstructions of themselves. Keep movin' everybody on. That's the main thing. Keep movin' everybody an' everythin' on. An' if they won't move, report 'em or lock 'em up. Keep the world a-movin' on; that's your duty."

"Aw reet," said Bill.

When he geet cautside on t' Teawn Ha' Square he looked reawnd, considerin' a minute or two.

Then he walked along Oxford Street, past t' Market, an' geet on St. George's Road. Here a dug stood at a corner an' stared at him.

"Come," said Bill, stoppin' an' addressin' t' dug, "be movin' on."

Th' dug sit deawn.

"If theau doesn't be movin' on," said Bill, "I'st ha' t' lock thee up."

Th' dug barked. "Come, be movin' on," said Bill. "Move on—move on."

Th' dug didn't oss t' stir; so Bill went up to it. As soon as he geet near it th' dug stuck eaut its jib an' snapped at his leg. Bill backed pretty sharp. "Well, if theau'll noan move on, I will," he said; an' off he walked as fast as he could, cautiously glancin' reawnd every second to see if t' dug were on his track till he geet to a distance that were safely eaut o' bitin' range.

Next he seed a woman on her own doorstep. Bill marched up to her.

"Heaw lung han yo' been here?" he axed.

"Fifteen year next Aister," said t' woman; meeanin' that hoo'd lived in that cottage that length o' time.

"Well it's time yo' were movin' on," said Bill. "Move on."

"I'st noan move for nobody," said t' woman. "I pays my rent, an' pays my road, an' I'st stop wheer I am; for I hate flittin'."

"Yo're a quare woman if yo' durnt' like flittin'," said Bill; "but whetlier or not yo'll ha' t' move on."

"Ger away, theau greight foo'," said t' woman, gooin' in an slammin' t' dur i' Bill's face.

"This weren't do," said Bill. "I'st ha' t' lock somebody up as a hexample. Nobody taks no notice on me. I durn't want t' lock nobody up, but I see I shall have for t' do to save my karickter."

Next he spied a sparrow on some railin's. "Move on!" he sheauted, an' t' sparrow flew to th' heausetop.

"That's moor like," said Bill. "Neaw we're improvin'," an' he nodded his yead, so approvingly that th' helmet slipped an' th' prato rowled eaut.

"Hey, yo've lost yore dinner," sheauted a little lad.

"No impidence," said Bill, "or I'll warm thy onion for thee."

After various adventures, such as arrestin' a funeral for furious drivin', an' quietenin' a lost child by lettin' it mak' mud-pies in his helmet, as well as buyin' it a cake, Bill, after a couple of days, were towed by some o' th' policemen that he'd better be lockin' somebody up or he'd be gettin' sacked.

"Theau's been bobbyin' a month," said one, "an' noan had a gradely case yet. Theau's done nowt for thy brass. Heaw con ta' forshame to tak th' money?"

Bill went on neet duty that neet. He'd been instructed to watch a pub. or two to see that they turned t' company eaut an' didn't supply any ale after eleven o'clock. This job Bill managed aw reet, for he went t' landlords o' three places an' said, "Neaw I'm beawnd t' keep my eye on yore place to-neet, so just mind what yo're doin'."

Th' landlords thanked Bill very much an' said they were sure he'd do his duty; an' then, soon as his back were turned, lowfed at him for bein' such a foo' as to come an' warn 'em. "That mon ull never get a case i' this world," they said to theirsels.

But he did. He fun' a drunken chap lyin' near th' Teawn Hall, an' he carried him in. As it happened, th' drunken chap were Alderman Wigglewag, the Chairman o' th' Watch Committee, an' next mornin' there were a rumpus o'er th' affair.

Th' Chief Constable sent for Bill into his reaum.

"We've decided to dispense with your services," he said.

"What for?" said Bill.

"Why, you thundering idiot!—what did you do last night?"

"Locked a drunken chap up," said Bill.

"It was Alderman Wigglewag, you lunatic."

"Whoever he were, he were drunk."

"You ought not to have locked him up!"

"What should I ha' done, then?"

"You donkey! You should have called a cab and seen him safe home."

"An' if I see a poor labourer drunk should I put him in a cab an' send him whum, too?"

"Certainly not! You are a fool!"

"It seems true, then, that t' law shakes honds wi' t' rich but pounces t' poor."

"Clear off with you!"

"Thank yo'," said Bill. "I'm quite willin' to give o'er, but yo' cawd me a donkey, an idiot, an' a foo', an' aw them sort o' names. Well, I'll forgive yo', seein' that yo' didn't caw me a chief constable. Good mornin'." An' off Bill strutted, sayin', "That were one for his nob, anyheav. I'm gettin' quite comic wi' my wit. Well, this ends my bobbyin'—I'm too blunderin' honest to get on at owt."

A WINTER RIDE.

Frequently during the year, sometimes even in the autumn and winter days, I cycle from the seaside town where I live in Windmill Land to the dear old borough where I was born in Steam Engine Land, in order to see the old folks and the old faces (now becoming sadly fewer), and the old places, many of them now transformed, but, I must admit—such as old Deansgate and the streets round the Town Hall—for the better. One does not mind change when it makes for beauty and delight, and if only the marvellous Mr. Mawson can manage to get Bolton and its environs shaped according to his dream I for one will join in due song of thanksgiving.

On this Saturday, in my ride from the sea inland, I had as tough a forty miles as ever I encountered in a long cycling career. The boisterous east wind put me to the tug. Nearing Bolton little showers of snow blew from Rivington and Winter Hill. But, as philosopher Emerson says, there are compensations for everything. That icy wind fanned the red blood into fire, and gave me an appetite that would have sent the Food Controller into fits (this was in March, 1918, while the war was on—by the way, I passed big queues waiting their turn to buy food, in the streets of Chorley).

I decided to go back by way of Belmont to Preston. It is collar-work to Belmont, but the highway over the moors is much better surfaced (no paving-stones) than the road